



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

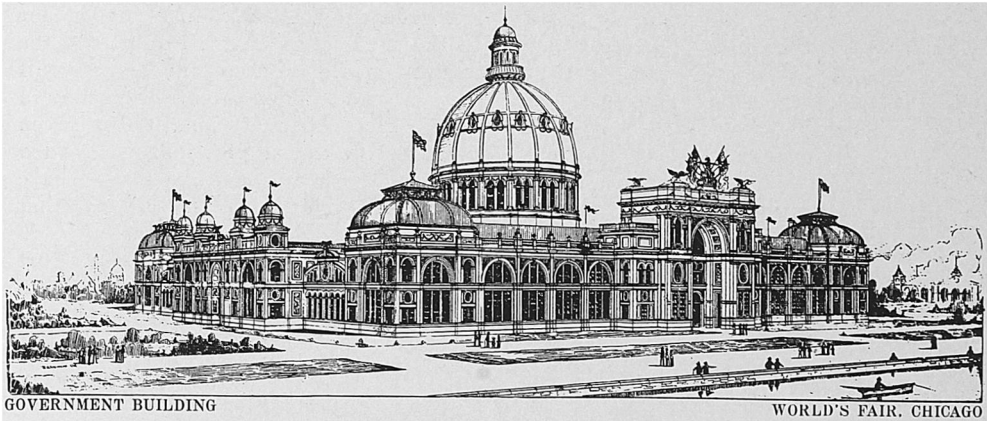
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



FEDERAL BUILDINGS

BY MONTGOMERY SCHUYLER

SECOND PAPER

THE system or no-system denounced and renounced by Mr. Potter did not for some years bear its ripest fruits nor show itself at its ugliest. That was because Mr. Potter's immediate successor, who had been, I believe, his principal assistant, was an architect of training and discretion. During his incumbency nothing vulgar, pretentious, ridiculous, or otherwise outrageous, nothing clearly "unfit to build," emanated from the office of the Supervising Architect. It is true that nothing exquisitely artistic came out, either, but the projects were always sensible, straightforward, and of a simplicity not without dignity. Taking the whole period during which the office has been in existence, one would very willingly compound for Mr. Hill as being far above the average. Simplicity, indeed, he may very well have felt to be imposed upon him by those conditions of his office against which his predecessor had protested, simplicity and also the monotony with which his official works are perhaps justly chargeable. Though his designs were by no means "standardized," they strongly resemble one another. But an architect who has a great many buildings

to do, and a great many other things to do besides, may justly conclude, on the one hand, that he is doing the best of which the case admits when he adjusts the masses of his building in a satisfactory and effective way (and this is a point in which Mr. Hill's buildings very seldom failed), and when he simplifies the detail to the utmost; and, on the other hand, since no two of the buildings will ever be seen together, if he devotes himself to working out a few studied designs rather than to turning out a multitude of unstudied. In fact, the monotony is much more manifest in looking over a collection of Mr. Hill's designs than in seeing the buildings themselves as one meets them one by one in traveling about through the various cities that contain them. If the work of the office had always been as well done as it was under Mr. Hill, with an occasional competition or "direct selection," in the case of a building of great importance, there would have been no uprising against it. But the wheel was bound to turn, and the next turn was to the bottom. It was, I think, Mr. Hill's immediate successor who proclaimed, on taking office, that the public architecture

had been too long dominated by the effete East, and that he had arrived to give "Western ideas" a chance. As nobody but himself had any notion what "Western ideas" in architecture might be, they never having been realized in structures that commanded the admiration of mankind, this proclamation was adapted to excite hilarity among the young and thoughtless, and apprehension among the judicious. Both emotions were soon justified. It presently appeared that Western ideas meant the multiplication of architectural motives, the redundancy of architectural "features," as if one should attempt to enhance the expressiveness and attractiveness of the human countenance by equipping it with five eyes and two noses, and these features not adjusted to it but thrown at it, and fixed in masonry wherever they happened to land. One speaks cautiously, remembering some of his successors, but one is inclined to believe that the gentleman from Colorado still holds the record for featurefulness, that his are the "thingiest" things the United States of America was ever deluded into perpetuating in durable and costly building materials. For some years he continued to ply his "dreadful trade" at the public expense. His successors were like unto him, like if "less so." His immediate successor announced in his first report that he had been in charge of the office only two months. Yet the report to which this was a prefix contains as an appendix views of no less than thirteen of the reporter's designs for public buildings, all of considerable, some of great, size and costliness. Any one of them, if it had been really studied, would have accounted, in carrying it through the various stages necessary to produce a trustworthy perspective, for the full time which had been divided among the whole thirteen. As a matter of fact, they were all unstudied, and unfit to build.

And so it went on, not from bad to worse, for there could be no anti-climax after the Western idealist who had had charge of the public architecture for three or four years, but about as bad as bad could be. One or two of the appointees between 1877 and 1895 took into the office

fair professional reputations. Hardly one of them took such a reputation out. How many names can you recall of the list—Bell, Freret, O'Rourke, Erdbrooke? Can you recall any? Among them they achieved the apparently impossible task of making Mullett regretted. It were unprofitable to hunt for differences among them. Will you allow me to quote, as to their respective architectural merits, what Dr. Johnson said about the respective poetical merits of one Derrick and one Smart: "Sir, there is no settling the point of precedency between a louse and a flea." But, except an occasional remonstrance of the architects against the "system" nothing was done or seriously attempted to prevent this procession of incompetents from loading the land with eyesores and scandals. The whole thing was in the power of the Secretary of the Treasury. If a single Secretary, during all those years, had been a man of interest and cultivation in architecture, then, in the language of Carlyle, the "devouring absurdity" would have been "extinguished." But there was no such Secretary, and, indeed, no reason why there should have been, seeing that for the duties which the Secretary of the Treasury is appointed to perform, insensibility to art is no drawback whatever. The fault was in the system which makes it possible for one Boeotian to make another the Government architect, a Government architect who need give no guarantees of competence whatever except that a Secretary who does not necessarily know anything about it thinks him a good architect, a Government architect with the status of a clerk removable at will, who yet has the absolute control of more money to be wisely spent or foolishly squandered under the pretence of furnishing architecture than any other architect in the world! That is the real "devouring absurdity." And note that he would be a bold man, that it would even be a bold "architectural deputation," who should wait upon a Secretary of the Treasury to inform him that the architect of his choice was a bad architect. It is notorious that the average man is no quicker to resent an imputation on his



GOVERNMENT BUILDING

WORLD'S FAIR. ST. LOUIS

honesty than on his "taste"—especially if he hasn't any.

At last the no-system broke down under its own weight. The official architect of the Government Building at the World's Fair in Chicago had the honor of contributing the last straw that broke the back of that heavy-laden and much-enduring camel, the United States of America. That monstrous and ridiculous edifice shamed the American people, of which so considerable a proportion saw the show, into thinking that there must be a more excellent way. Object-teaching was the only kind of which the case admitted, and here was an object lesson that could not be overlooked or lost. You are to remember that people in general are educated to an appreciation of artistic architecture by having artistic architecture to look at and can be taught in no other way. The difference between good and bad requires acquaintance with the good in order to be perceptible. That is the saddest thing about those monstrosities with which the Government loaded the land, excepting the brief interval of the incumbency of Mr. Potter and Mr. Hill, from 1873 to 1893. Children grew up in the shadow of these monstrosities, officially commended to them and imposed upon them as examples of the fine art of architecture, and were taught, as Carlyle has it, "to twine their young affections round that sort of object." But at Chicago the wayfaring man, though a member of

Congress, could not err therein, having the real thing at which to look. There he saw his Uncle Sam acting in the capacity of the drunken Helot for the admonition of those Spartan boys, his nephews. The unofficial architecture was admirable. The official architecture was detestable. The official building brooked no rival near its throne of detestability, excepting possibly the building, also official, of the State of Illinois. No American of any sensibility at all could mark the contrast without some patriotic shame, without desiring that our official architecture might be raised to the level of our unofficial architecture. The passage of the Tarsney act was secured by the Columbian Exposition.

Truly, it was a very minimum of betterment that the Tarsney act provided. It was merely a mild permission to the Secretary of the Treasury to institute competitions for the design of government buildings. There being nothing mandatory about it, the Secretary of the Treasury might, "in his discretion," have nullified it altogether, and appointed another Mullett to magnify his office and continue to absorb all the public work. In fact, the unquestionable amelioration of the public architecture since the passage of the Tarsney act is only in a small measure due to that act. It is in far larger measure due to the far higher artistic class of the Supervising Architects whom it has been put into the hearts of

Secretaries of the Treasury to appoint since the Tarsney act was passed. The improvement dates from the appointment of Mr. William Martin Aiken by Secretary Carlisle in 1895. Since that date, during the two years' term of Mr. Aiken, and twelve years' service of Mr. Taylor, it has been maintained and increased, until the official architecture of the country is now fairly on a level with the unofficial architecture, and the buildings designed in the office of the Supervising Architect do not suffer by comparison with the buildings designed in competition under the Tarsney act. Meanwhile, the competitions themselves have been conducted, apparently, with no other view than to secure for the work in hand the architect best qualified to do it. Compare, for example, Mr. Aiken's "Mint" at Denver, with the Post Office at that place of his Occidentalizing and featureful predecessor, and learn "the valley of peace and quietness," as the sensitive among the youth of Denver must, ever since the erection of the later building, have been doing! A still more striking comparison is that which institutes itself when the unofficial and the official architecture come into direct competition, as in the case of a World's Fair. Whereas we saw Uncle Sam at Chicago in the capacity of a drunken Helot, at Buffalo and at St. Louis we have seen him in the capacity of a sober and well-behaved Spartan parent, setting an excellent example to the Spartan boys.

But how precarious it all is! The country has many architects. But it has still more "architects," and among these "architects" there is hardly one who does not yearn to be the Supervising Architect, and to revolutionize the Federal architecture by perpetuating his own illiteracy and crudity in lasting monuments. All that is needed to undo the good work that has been done is that there should be, as well there may be, some insensitive and credulous Secretary of the Treasury whom some one of the "architects" can persuade that he, the "architect," is a great architectural genius, as Mullett persuaded his Secretary, as the successors of Mr. Potter and Mr. Hill persuaded

their Secretaries. Then we should have another "period of darkness." Can anybody seriously dispute that it is time we took more pains to maintain the improvement that we have attained, not through any provision, but out of sheer and undeserved good luck, that the legislature should abandon the contemptuous carelessness and happy-go-luckiness with which it has hitherto treated the whole question of public art? "They order these matters better in France." We need not go so far as to demand that the fine arts be made the subject-matter of a "Ministry" and that the official in charge of them have a seat in the Cabinet. Nobody goes so far as that. But it is not going too far to demand that he shall have the dignity of a Chief of Bureau, and a distinct legal and official status. It is not going too far to require that the architect responsible for the architecture of the Federal Buildings should be required to give more substantial guarantees of professional competency than the caprice of some casual Secretary of the Treasury. "Indemnity for the past" is unhappily out of the question. But "security for the future" we have it in our power to exact. It will be the fault of the art lovers and art students of the country if they do not find the way to break in upon the apathy of Congress so far as to procure the exaction of it by law.

The Grolier Club of New York has again stood sponsor for a publication of much value—a great pictorial catalogue, with descriptive text, of "The Etched Work of Whistler." This work, which is in reality a monument to the genius of a great artist, was printed at the De Vinne Press and consists of a quarto accompanied by three portfolios containing more than a thousand facsimiles. An introduction has been written by Royal Cortissoz, but the work of compilation, arrangement, and description has been done by Edward G. Kennedy, who conceived the project and carried it to completion with unflagging enthusiasm. As usual, the form of this publication is rich and the edition limited.